

PM UJJWALA YOJANA: MAKING WOMEN HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER

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In rural areas cooking is one of the chores that capture day to day life majorly, people do not get time to look beyond these chores and contribute in a productive manner. Nearly 121 million households are still using the inefficient chulhas as per the Census 2011. As per a WHO report, smoke inhaled by women from unclean fuel is equivalent to burning 400 cigarettes in an hour.

It has been stated that almost 38 per cent of the world's population is still dependent on traditional biomass for cooking. As rural women play an important role in a family because of their central responsibility for managing household and cooking needs, exposure to indoor air pollution primarily affects their health along with other members. Their vulnerability to health hazards increases due to the pollution generated from inefficient burning of biomass and use of traditional biomass cook stoves. The pollution does not confine to household but also affect the nearby atmosphere. In rural areas cooking is one of the chores that capture day to day life majorly, people do not get time to look beyond these chores and contribute in a productive manner. Nearly 121 million households are still using the inefficient chulhas as per the Census 2011. As per a WHO report, smoke inhaled by women from unclean fuel is equivalent to burning 400 cigarettes in an hour.

The **Sustainable Development Goal – 7** sets an objective to provide access to an affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy services by 2030. To ensure access to reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all, clean energy at an affordable price by 2030 set direction to all. All nations must stride for meeting these objectives as the absence of universal energy access may lead to a failure of the world's energy system –

- To increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix;
- Double the global rate of

improvement in energy efficiency;

- Enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology;
- Advance and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology.

In India, nearly 40 per cent of the population is deprived of clean energy for cooking. Recognizing LPG as a major component of the clean cooking solution, India has taken lead to provide a clean solution to BPL families through about 80 million LPG connections by 2020 under the major program of **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)**. The scheme was launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister in May 2016 in District Ballia of Uttar Pradesh initially targeting the provision of 2 of 50 million LPG connections to the rural women. The focus was given to the States/ UTs having LPG coverage less than the National average of 61 per cent as on 01.01.2016. The connections are released in the name of the adult woman member of a BPL family having no LPG connection either in the name of the beneficiary or any other family member and based on Socio-Economic Caste Census Data. The government has now taken an initiative to upscale that target up to 80 million connections by 2020.

Achievements of PMUY:

Use of LPG as a cooking fuel has helped in a big way to rural women, empowering their livelihood in terms of improvement in health, and the increased economic productivity by saving time spent on arranging



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cooking needs. As of November 2017, about 32 million LPG connections in about 712 districts have been released under PMUY.

To make the LPG shift easier for its consumers, the ministry and Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) joined hands to actively promote the transition. Firstly, by using electronic bank accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile phones to shift the payment of subsidy amount to user's bank account directly. Secondly, an appeal—**Give-it up** was made to forego the subsidies of middle-class households in favour of the needy, resulting in 13 million people releasing their subsidies.

As claimed by MoPNG the scheme has brought down the upfront LPG cost. Earlier, Rs 4,500 to Rs 5,000 used to be the amount spent for an LPG connection, but the bulk purchase has reduced it to Rs 3,200. Under PMUY, half of the money is provided to the users as a one-time grant by the government. The user needs to bear the cost of a hot plate and the first refill totalling to Rs 1600, however, OMCs are offering an option of EMI for the same. The loan availed by the households is recovered from approximately seven to eight refilling. Once the amount is recovered, the subsidy continues and is transferred to the customer's account. State Governments have also come forward to provide support by funding either stove or regulators. It is a perfect example of cooperative federalism where Centre and States have joined hands to resolve a common issue of cooking.

When one looks at how PMUY has progressed, one sees the promotional changes – linking bank accounts and giving up subsidies. In the first year, against the target of 15 million connections, 22 million LPG connections were distributed. As per a study done by Council for Energy and Environment and 3 Water (CEEW) and GIZ, Germany, the Uttar Pradesh has benefitted the most with 5.8 million LPG connections by now, followed by West Bengal with 3.9 million connections.

There are many questions raised about the PMUY scheme that the rural LPG users do not go for frequent refills due to insufficient funds. Many think-tanks are carrying out research and field studies to look beyond what numbers highlight in terms of provided connections; hence, one must



Smokeless kitchens have become a reality with poor women getting LPG connections

not overlook the broad goal set behind the scheme. The cost people incur on medicine on account of health hazard due to inefficient burning of biomass is not comparable with the incurred cost of LPG cylinder refill. Similarly, the time spent by rural women in arranging fuel woods and carrying water is also significant, which can be utilised for other productive output. It should also be noted

Pradhan Mantri LPG Panchayat Scheme

The LPG Panchayat scheme aims at spreading awareness among LPG users about how to properly use clean fuel and its useful benefits. It will provide platform to trigger discussion through sharing of personal experiences on benefits of use of clean fuel compared to traditional fuels like cowdung, charcoal or wood.

It also aims to connect with beneficiaries of Ujjwala Yojana to resolve issues and wrong traditional beliefs among people through officials of oil PSUs, NGOs, ASHA workers and social workers. Under it, one lakh LPG Panchayats will be activated across country to deal with issue of safe use of LPG as well as discuss its various benefits on environment, health and how it empowers women.

LPG Panchayat will serve as an interactive platform between those who received LPG cylinders under PMUY. One panchayat will have around 100 LPG customers of nearby areas. The Panchayats discuss issues such as safe practices, quality of service provided by distributors and availability of refill cylinders.



LPG connections have brought much needed relief for rural women by reducing the effort and time they spend on fuelwood collection

that a behavioural change will take some time to happen; people accustomed to the traditional cooking system may need some time to change their cooking practice. This is the beginning; people will certainly change their mindset and switch to cleaner fuel at the end of the day. Fuel stacking is also practiced in many parts of our country. In rural areas, the fuel stacking varies from cow dung cake, wood to LPG whereas, in urban areas it is in the form of LPG, and the electric cooking system (microwave, induction plates). Thus, it is pertinent to say that behavioural changes may also impact the success of the PMUY scheme.

PMUY is a sincere effort to make Indian rural women feel empowered along with reducing the health effects of household air pollution. Although not complete in itself, it started with a systematic approach. And, a lot more is needed from the affordability, accessibility, and behavioural aspects. The scheme is a transformation in the livelihoods of rural women, but requires a more considerate and planned hustle. Maybe an effort from the privileged ones, private companies, and communities would bring the change. Therefore, awareness also has a major role to play.

The PMUY is likely to result in an additional employment of around 1 Lakh and provide a business opportunity of at least Rs. 10,000 Cr. over the next 3 years to the Indian industry. This scheme has provided great opportunities under the 'Make in India' campaign for all the manufacturers of cylinders, gas stoves, regulators, and gas hose.

Way forward

- a. As far as clean cooking energy access is concerned, another possible alternative for cooking is using electricity for clean cooking in rural areas. Village electrification program of the Ministry of Power, Government of India aims to provide universal access to electricity by extending the grid to remote areas. Electricity will definitely become a reality for cooking needs in the rural areas in the form of induction stoves. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India being a great believer in technology and innovations has directed one of our leading oil & gas major ONGC to work towards making an "efficient electric chulha (stove)", which would enable cooking using the solar power. India as uniquely placed on the globe, observes about 300 sunny days – that means a huge potential to generate abundant solar energy and the unique advantage may resolve the issue of clean cooking to a larger extent.
- b. Rural households form bulk of the problem and need a specialized strategy for their varied cooking needs, including water heating and fodder preparation. Stacking of fuels is the norm and is acknowledged. Hence, every home will have more than one cooking fuel.
- c. A National Mission on Clean Cooking (NMCC) needs to be pursued to coordinate efforts on cooking fuels, efficient cookstoves and related R&D with an aim to achieve full clean cooking fuel coverage by 2022. This aims at creating an ecosystem of a mass market for cookstoves, electric cooking appliances, bottled LPG in various refill sizes, setting up of fuel distributorships across the country. This should also strengthen city gas distribution networks in urban areas to provide piped natural gas, and LPG connections on the account people in the urban areas can be diverted to rural areas. The clean cooking is a vast market, which need to be tapped with its economic spin-offs.

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